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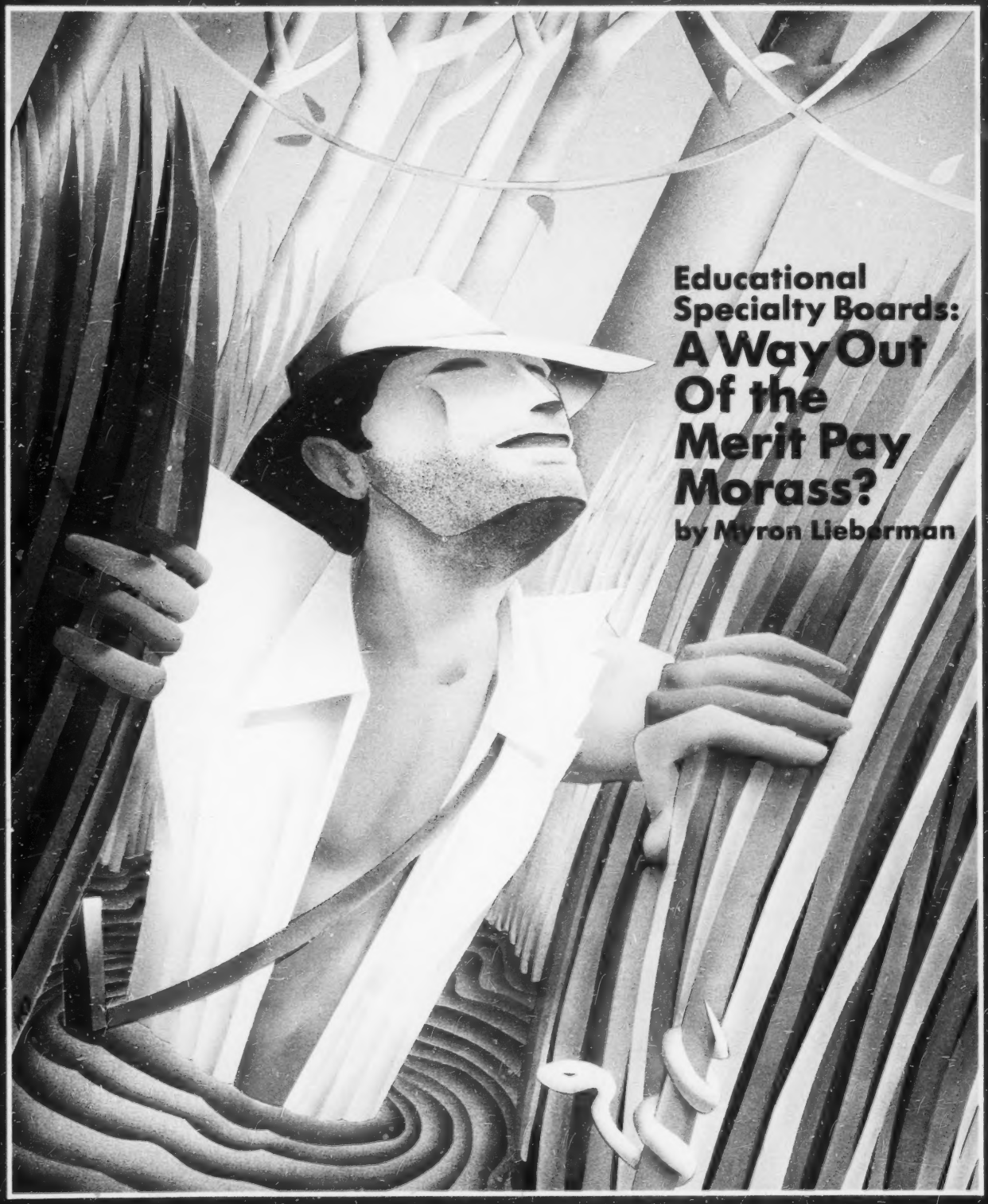
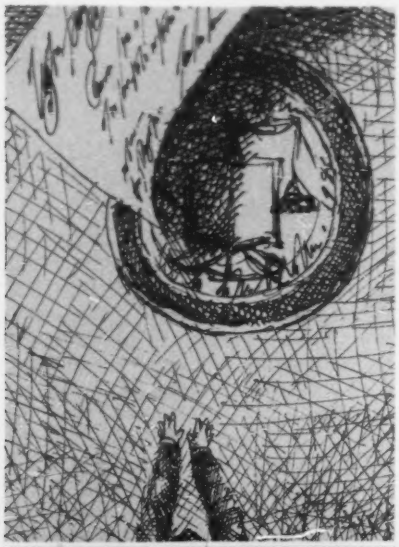
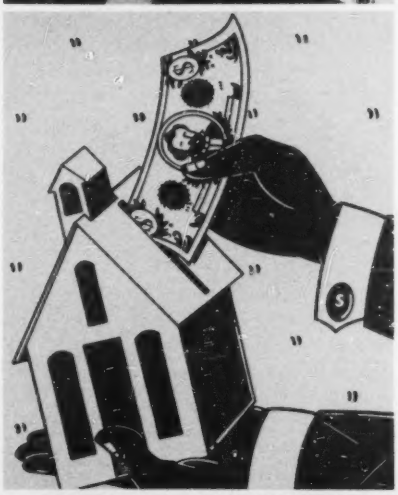


Educational Specialty Boards: A Way Out Of the Merit Pay Morass?

by Myron Lieberman





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Cover Illustration: Ned Shaw

Teacher Flight — Yes Or Guess?

by M. Gilbert Wilkins and Ann Korschgen

Wisconsin teachers have not been leaving the profession in significant numbers, claim the authors. There appears to be ample time to address the problem of teacher flight.

MUCH HAS BEEN written about academically able teachers leaving the profession in significant numbers, in publications ranging from the *Wall Street Journal* to the *Phi Delta Kappan*.[1] Although reports and articles about ways to increase the retention of academically able teachers continue to appear, some researchers are beginning to question whether or not the retention problem has been overstated.[2]

Everyone has assumed that the number of teachers leaving the profession is high, especially among the most able. But who is the keeper of these numbers? After consulting with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the Education Commission of the States, we concluded that no one seems to have collected recent data on just how many teachers are leaving their jobs.

The Wisconsin Association of School Personnel Administrators decided to undertake a study that would answer the following three questions: 1) What was the rate of teacher resignation in Wisconsin public schools for the 1982-83 and 1983-84 school years? 2) Of those teachers who resigned, what percentage left the field of education altogether? 3) According to district administrators' appraisals, what was the quality of the teachers who left? (Our study did not include teachers who retired.)

We surveyed all 432 school districts in Wisconsin and received 346 responses (80%). The questionnaire we circulated asked for the number of full-time-equivalent (FTE) teachers employed by each district for the target school years, the number of FTE teachers who resigned during those years, and the number of FTE teachers who resigned in order to leave education. We also asked the districts to compare the ability of those who resigned with that of the entire staff. Finally, we asked the district administrators to give reasons for the teachers' resignations.

Table 1 shows the number of FTE teachers who resigned, by year and by size of district. Of the 34,955 FTE teachers in 1982-83, 961 (2.8%) resigned. In 1983-84, 1,166 (3.4%) of 34,800 FTE teachers resigned. The largest percentage of those who re-

M. GILBERT WILKINS (La Crosse Wisconsin Chapter) is director of personnel for the School District of La Crosse, Wis. ANN KORSCHGEN is director of career services at the University of Wisconsin at La Crosse.

Table 1.
Teacher Resignations, by Year and District Size

Size of District	Number of Districts	FTE Teachers Employed	Number of Resignations	Percentage of Resignations
1982-83				
0-50 teachers	143	4,526.11	193.70	4.28
51-200	169	15,834.68	439.42	2.78
More than 200	34	14,594.30	328.70	2.25
Total	346	34,955.09	961.82	2.75
1983-84				
0-50 teachers	143	4,517.50	263.13	5.82
51-200	169	15,797.28	583.02	3.69
More than 200	34	14,485.38	320.59	2.21
Total	346	34,800.16	1,166.74	3.35

Table 2.
Resigning Teachers Leaving Education, By Year and District Size

Size of District	Number of Districts	FTE Teachers Employed	Number of Resignations	Percentage of Resignations
1982-83				
0-50 teachers	143	4,526.11	67.80	1.50
51-200	169	15,834.68	150.75	0.95
More than 200	34	14,594.30	137.30	0.94
Total	346	34,955.09	355.85	1.02
1983-84				
0-50 teachers	143	4,517.50	86.82	1.92
51-200	169	15,797.28	210.05	1.33
More than 200	34	14,485.38	108.69	0.75
Total	346	34,800.16	405.56	1.17

signed came from small school districts, and the smallest percentage came from large school districts. This was also true for those who resigned to leave education (Table 2).

The administrators who responded to our survey rated the teachers who left the profession as better-than-average teachers. The composite figures for administrators' ratings for the two years we surveyed were: 24.57% below average, 36.65% average, and 38.78% above average. The reasons given by administrators for teachers' leaving education were: work opportunities outside of education (34%), relocation of spouse (20%), staying home with family (20%), disciplinary understanding with employee (8%), job dissatisfaction (3%), medical reasons (3%), and unknown and miscellaneous (12%).

"If you'd check your seating chart again, Mr. Budlong, I think you'd see you're supposed to be sitting over there."

We suggest that readers remain skeptical of articles purporting to describe an exodus of talent from the nation's classrooms.

Our findings suggest that Wisconsin teachers have not been leaving the profession in significant numbers. Indeed, the resignation rates for the years we studied were quite low. However, those who resigned to leave the field were judged to have average or above-average teaching ability, and this does support to some degree the concern about academically able people leaving teaching. But they are leaving at such a slow rate that there appears to be ample time to take steps to address the problem.

We cannot say for certain that Wisconsin teachers are representative of teachers nationwide, and we were unable to locate any similar studies of teachers in other states. Thus we can only surmise that the phenomenon of teacher flight has not been validated by research. Until it has been validated nationally, we can only suggest that readers remain skeptical of articles purporting to describe an exodus of talent from the nation's classrooms.

1. "Who Ruined the Schools?," *Wall Street Journal*, 12 May 1983, p. 24; and Nancy Cummings Perry, "New Teachers: Do 'the Best' Get Hired?," *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 1981, pp. 113-14.

2. F. Howard Nelson, "New Perspective on Teacher Quality Debate: Empirical Evidence from the National Longitudinal Survey," *Journal of Educational Research*, January/February 1985, pp. 133-40.